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ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS CONCERNING LOW BACK PAIN AMONG PHYSIOTHERAPY STUDENTS IN BELGIUM:

A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY.

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Background: Health care practitioners' (HCPs) attitudes and beliefs affect their work and activity recommendations. It has been demonstrated that HCPs with a biomedical orientation are less likely to adhere to the clinical guidelines for the management of chronic low back pain (LBP) and give their patients the advice to restrict work and activities compared to HCPs with a more biopsychosocial approach (Rainville et al. 2000, Houben et al. 2005).

Purpose: The purpose of the present study was to explore the attitudes and beliefs of physiotherapy students in bachelor and master in Belgium, since these beliefs are expected to be partially culturally determined. Secondly, we want to examine the influence of a history of LBP on these attitudes and beliefs.

Methods: Participants (second and fourth grade students) were recruited during lectures. Students filled in a set of questionnaires: a questionnaire about their personal background, the pain attitude and beliefs scale (PABS) and the health care providers' pain and impairment relationship scale (HC-PAIRS). A vignette (describing a case) was given to evaluate treatment recommendations (activity restriction, work absenteeism) (Rainville et al. 1995).

Group equality was examined by t-tests, chi-square tests in crosstabs or Fisher's exact test. Pearson correlations were used to determine the correlation between the variables.

Results: Six Belgian (4 Flemish and 2 Walloon) institutes were contacted and agreed to participate. In the second grade a total of 766 students participated; in the fourth grade 584.

In total 46% experienced LBP at some point of their life, and 15% suffered from LBP at the time of questioning. Students of the second grade scored significantly higher on the PABS biomedical subscale (PABS-BM) and on the HC-PAIRS ($p < .01$). On the PABS psychosocial subscale (PABS-PS), fourth-grade students scored significantly higher ($p < .01$). Students suffering from LBP scored significantly higher on the HC-PAIRS ($p < .05$). No difference was found in the scores of the PABS.

On the questions about activity and work recommendations in the vignette, significantly more master students answered guideline consistent (resp. 61% and 23%) than bachelor students (resp. 33% and 9%) ($p < .01$). No significant differences were found between participants with or without a history of LBP, except for activity recommendations; Students who experienced LBP at some point in their life answered significantly more guideline consistent. However in total, only 45% and 15% of the students answered according to the guidelines concerning respectively activity recommendations and work recommendations.

The PABS-BM was negatively correlated with the PABS-PS (-0.11) and positively with the HC-PAIRS (0.47 $p < .01$). The HC-PAIRS correlated negatively with the PABS-PS (-0.22 $p < .01$).

Conclusion: Fourth grade students have a more biopsychosocial belief and attitude compared to 2nd grade students. However, guideline adherence concerning activity and work recommendations seems to be relatively low in all students.

Implications: Students with more experience demonstrate a more biopsychosocial attitude. Further research should examine how a more guideline consistent behavior can be obtained by physiotherapy students. Furthermore, the attitudes and beliefs of Belgian therapists should be examined.

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